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C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 000337

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DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

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TAGS: [CU](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: LEADING DISSIDENT TELLS US NOT TO UNDERESTIMATE
CUBA'S PROPAGANDA MACHINE

REF: A. HAVANA 305

[1](#)B. HAVANA 333

[1](#)C. HAVANA 336

Classified By: COM: Michael E. Parmly : For reasons 1.4 b/d

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Prominent pro-democracy advocate, Martha Beatriz Roque (MBR), carefully watched official Cuban news coverage of the 4/21 police action to break up a demonstration by the organization Damas de Blanco ("Ladies in White"). She stated that while the coverage seems clumsy and hastily slapped together, it is effective to many Cubans who have limited access to information. She pointed out that accusations that opposition organizations are being manipulated by the US government may seem preposterous, but cautioned that accusations such as ties to Luis Posada Carriles, will have resonance with some segments of the Cuban population. End summary

[1](#)2. (C) Martha Beatriz Roque, one of Cuba's most outspoken opposition figures and the only women arrested in the crackdown against dissidents in 2003, spoke to Com and Poloff on 22 April. She reviewed in great detail the coverage on Cuba state media of the police on 4/21 forcefully breaking up the demonstration of Damas de Blanco ("Ladies in White"). She noted that the anchorman used the masculine form of "counter-revolutionaries" to refer to the Damas, even though all the participants were women. She also noted that they showed one after another three women identified as a "student", a "worker" and a "housewife" stating that they spontaneously had to express their outrage when they happened to observe the "counter-revolutionaries" and "agents of the empire" desecrating the historic Revolution Square. MBR then said that the coverage used voice-over of a tapped conversation between Congressperson Ileana Ros-Lehtinen with photographs of USINT COM Michael Parmly greeting dissidents at various receptions. There was an insert of hands passing large amounts of American dollars. When the anchorman spoke of the "Miami mafia", there was footage of a para-military group distributing rifles. The report ended with mention of connections between Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and "known terrorist" Luis Posada Carriles.

[1](#)3. (C) MBR stated that the news report was hastily put

together and clearly just threw out a variety of images without demonstrating any logical connection. However, she advised that a wide range of Cubans are upset about the issue of Posada Carriles and this propaganda campaign can damage the image of the opposition and the US government in the minds of some Cubans. She did say that offsetting this is the fact that nearly all Cubans know about Damas de Blanco and respect the organization.

¶4. (C) MBR's newly formed unity coalition, Agenda for Transition (see reftel) swiftly sent out a statement condemning the police action. She also remarked that she has been invited to discuss the issue at the French Embassy. MBR also has been invited to address the monthly meeting of the missions of the EU countries to discuss human rights in Cuba. MBR tries to communicate frequently with the representatives of the EU because she views that they are in a difficult position given Spain's push to engage the Cuban government. She also related that she had heard from a source she did not identify that the Vatican had promised the GOC that the Pope would ask President Bush to end the economic embargo.

¶5. (C) MBR noted that during the press conference of April 10 to discuss the unity meeting of opposition groups, media pressed her on the question of the embargo, a subject that divides the opposition. MBR on such occasions always states that the main objective is the end the GOC's fifty year old embargo on the rights of the Cuban people.

¶6. (C) Comment: When MBR, one of the fiercest critics of the GOC, advises that a seemingly absurd propaganda campaign by the GOC, is being effective, she should be listened to.

PARMLY